

[Nat Henderson]

1

Wm. V. Ervin, PW; wichita Falls, Texas

Words 2,040

Page 1

INTERVIEW WITH [NAT?] HENDERSON, EARLY SETTLER, WICHITA FALLS, 907
Hamilton Bldg., Wichita Falls, Texas.

"I came to Wichita Falls in 1883 from Seguin, in South Texas. Up here, in a new town, I had opportunity that I wouldn't have had down there. There I would have had to wait until the old [?] died off.

"When I came here Seventh Street was the main street of the town. There were only two or three brick buildings, which were on Seventh street, between Ohio and Indiana avenues. There was a stone building over where Saul's store is now, on Indiana. Colonel J. G. James started his bank there.

"The town had only about seven hundred people in it when I came here, but by 1890 it went to two thousand. However, the terminus of the railroad was moved to Harrold and the drought came on, and things got in bad shape. Nearly everybody was broke, and we even abolished the city incorporation.

"I was going down the street one day, and didn't have a cent in my pocket. I thought if I had any money I'd get a shave and a glass of beer. There were papers folded up in my pocket, newspaper clippings and memorandum slips, and I happened to take them out and looked through them, not having anything else to do. I found a piece of paper folded up which seemed heavier a little than the other papers and looked a little less worn. I unfolded

Library of Congress

it and it was a check for \$38.65 made out to a client of mine and given to me for him about three months before; however, I had already paid my client, and so the check was mine. I've made deals since then in which I have made several thousand dollars, but none of them looked as big to me as that check did then. I got the shave and the beer, and—well, I don't know, but I guess I played poker with the rest of it. There wasn't much to do anyway then, but gamble. There wasn't much business, and no amusements. A lot of the people had left, and the population 2 of the town had gone down about half.

“In 1885 the ranchmen around here leased 900,000 acres of Indian lands in the Indian Territory. The east part of this body of land was taken by Addington and the Suggs brothers, then Barnett and Waggner and Stinson and Herring. This was the real Big Pasture. What was called the Big Pasture in the Territory a number of years later was only forty or fifty thousand acres. I was employed by them to survey this 900,000 acres. Quanah Parker, with some braves of his tribe, came along as body guard, and they were needed.

“The Kiowas objected to the arrangement, and after we got started with the surveying we kept [hearing?] that the Kiowas were coming, and the possibilities were that they would be on the warpath.

“One day Quanah and I went up on a little hill so he could show me how they wanted the line to run. As we looked around we saw twenty-five or thirty Kiowas ride out of the brush, and they appeared to be heading toward our camp, which was off across a creek. Quanah signalled the Kiowas to stop, and we went down to where they were. Quanah started [parleying?] with them and he also [?] [sent?] a runner after his crowd, who were mostly over about the camp. They threatened Quanah, and he told them, “You do anything to me, my young men will get you all.” We had an interpreter along named Sanders. He said to me that we'd better get [you?] [there?]. About that time Quanah's crowd arrived, and there were forty or fifty of them. The Kiowas whirled their ponies and rode back away from us and dismounted and got their rifles ready to shoot.. We hustled back to the camp. We

Library of Congress

were sure there would be war between them. They powwowed for sometime, though, and finally the Kiowas went off, and Quanah told me we would go ahead with the line, but he changed its direction some.

“We went along through the day all right, without seeing the Kiowas again. 3 But Comanches kept showing up, and that night when we made camp there were about five more chiefs besides Quanah and about one hundred and fifty braves with their squaws and children, which made about five hundred people in the camp—and no telling how many dogs. My bunch and I, there were about five of us white men, moved our camp over south of Quanah's about a mile, figuring that the Kiowas would come from the north if they came again, and would miss us, and we would not be in the mixup if they had one. Well, about ninety of them came from the east the next morning and ran right on to our camp, and first thing we knew we were right in the middle of them. My ahir hair stood straight up. We thought we were goners. We were not armed except with pocketknives. One young brave grabbed at me and sort of startled me. He wanted some cigarette papers I had in my shirt pocket. He took the [packet?] and took one paper out and threw the rest in my face. I thought if I everhad him by himself I'd make him sorry for that. They let us alone, and went over to Quanah's camp. Both sides drew up in line of battle, and Quanah and his chiefs sent their women and children away, and it sure looked like they were going to have a fight. We watched to see what they would do, and we had better get out of there. We hadn't started, though, when [Quanah?] sent a messenger to us to tell us that we needn't be afraid, that we'd be “all same as squaw and papoose.” So that's how we were classed as non-[combatants?]. They powwowed again for sometimes, and again the Kiowas went off without fighting. We didn't have any more trouble with the Kiowas, but the Comanches stayed with us until we were headed toward Red River, away from the Kiowa country, and then they left us, telling us we would be all right then. I had a partner working with me—he wason the east side. It took us about three months to complete the job.

“The United Stated Government had no law under which it could lease the Indian lands, so the cattlemen had been using them and giving the Indians cattle 4 now and then. But

Library of Congress

at last it was decided to lease the lands outright, the cattlemen to pay so much per acre to the Indians, but it had to be winked at by the Government officials. Some of the cowmen said they would give the Indians three cents an acre. Burk Burnett said, "No, we'll give them six cents, and then we won't have any trouble with them." He and Cal Suggs were the brains of the outfit.

"Payment of the lease was to be made semi-annually. The ranchmen and Indians agreed to meet at Anadarko, where the Indian agency was, and have Mr. Hunt, the agent take the money and pay it out to the Indians. It figured out to about nine or ten dollars to every man, woman and child. I was asked to go along as I was by then well-known to the Indians. We started out from here with the money. There were sixteen buggies. When we got up there the Indians were late as usual, and hadn't arrived. We called on Mr. Hunt and asked him to take the money and pay each Indian his part. Mr. Hunt said that if he did so, that is if the money passed through his hands, he would have to account for it to the United States Government. He said that he would advise us to see the Indians and agree with them on a meeting place some distance from Anadarko. Well, that was all we could do, so as the Indians hadn't showed up we started back. We had got about fifteen miles from Anadarko when we ran into about a thousand Indians. We stopped to palaver with them. There wasn't anything else we could do anyhow, even if we'd wanted to. The chiefs gathered around and we told them what Mr. Hunt had said. They seemed sort of suspicious of us. One of them said. "That heap much money. Maybe white men no got." Well, we opened up our grips and showed them that we had the money all right. They were well pleased, and agreed on a time to meet us on Cash Creek, about forty miles from Anadarko. 5 "I went over there to the meeting. We camped and paid off all the Indians. We had a pay-off tent where we paid them off. Some of the Indians when they got their money would come to me and some of the other white men and ask us to count their money for them. Along in the evening I was laying down under a buggy about half asleep when an Indian came and put a purse in my hand. I thought he wanted me to count his money for him, so thinking to have some fun with him I slipped the purse in my pocket without

Library of Congress

saying, anything, and lay there like I had gone back to sleep. He still didn't say anything so I opened my eyes and looked around to see who he was, and he wasn't there. The purse he had thirty or forty dollars in it, and it was all there. I never did know which Indian it was that brought me the purse.

"The Indians called me Hendessy in trying to call my name. Quanah told me afterwards that when they were about to have trouble with the Kiowas he sent to Wichita Falls to buy cartridges. Before I got the surveying job completed and came back to Wichita Falls Quanah was down here, and when he got back he told me that my law partner had asked about me. Quanah said, "I tell him when Kiowas come Hendessy skaddddle down the road like hell," and he laughed big. He thought that was quite a joke on me. Quanah was a good fellow. When he was out in this country he was a blanket Indian, but when he came here he always wore white men's clothes.

"Henrietta got to be a good town before this town did. They had an electric plant over there before we did here. Kemp and Kell did a great thing for this town when they built the railroad from here over to Henrietta. It did an enormous business and started this town to growing, and it gave Kemp and Kell their big start. 6 "I was county surveyor for a while. I ran for county attorney in 1896 and was elected. It was against the law for there to be any public gambling, but it went on just the same. The sheriff and his men were in with the gamblers, and they had a regular gambling hall. I had been gambling some, and when I was elected country attorney they told me they were all right then as I [gambling?] and they didn't think I would enforce the law. I told 'em I wasn't going to [gamble?] any more they had to quit, too. But when I got in office and tried to enforce the law I soon found I was at [loggerheads?] with the sheriff and his department. I couldn't do a thing toward enforcing the law against gambling, and it went right on.

"There was a little man with the nerve of Bill McDonald who was a deputy sheriff. His name was Sam Abbott. He and the sheriff got at outs and the sheriff put him off the force. Sam came to me, and he said if I could get him an official position, we could clean up the

Library of Congress

gambling. I got him on as deputy constable. We cleaned up the gambling and there wasn't any gambling to speak of here for several years.

"I lived across the railroad. One evening after dark I got home I heard a loud shot [?] and then three shots, but not so loud. Somebody came for me soon after, and said it was Sam Abbott, that he had been shot and killed. The gamblers got him. We knew pretty well who it was, but we couldn't proof against him. It was a man named Wilson. He and the others planned it. I was some afraid they'd try to get me, and I didn't stay in any lighted rooms after dark. But I was told after Sam was killed that the gambling bunch wasn't after me; that they got Sam because they considered him a traitor to them as he had been in with them more or less, or they considered he had as he had been with the sheriff's force. Sam was shot with a shotgun loaded with buckshot, and at least 7 one of the shot went through his heart. He ran a hundred yards after he was shot and fired his pistol three times at the man that shot him, before he fell.

"While I was with the Indians on the surveying job we came on a big rattlesnake one day. He was stretched out. When I was a boy I had learned to grab snakes by their tale and kill them by snapping their head off. I grabbed this one by the tail and gave him a snap. It didn't jerk his head off, but it killed him. I gave him another jerk and popped his head off, and we never did find it. After that I was big medicine with the Indians.